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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

High-level interactive dialogue among ministers on building alliances to promote women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Chair's summary

1. On 15 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a high-level ministerial dialogue on building alliances to promote women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants in the high-level interactive dialogue exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic.

2. The Chair of the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Antonio de Aguiar Patriota, chaired and moderated the high-level interactive dialogue. The meeting opened with an introduction by the Chair. Ministers and high-level officials from 23 Member States exchanged good practices, modalities, ongoing and planned initiatives and efforts to build alliances. Six representatives from non-governmental organizations and trade unions, as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO), contributed their perspectives. The dialogue concluded with closing comments by the Chair, in which he provided highlights of the dialogue.

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Challenges to women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work and strategies for addressing them

3. Participants drew attention to persistent challenges women encounter in the changing world of work, voicing concerns about continuing occupational segregation, the precarious nature of and growth in informal work available to women, the concentration of women in lower paying jobs and in insecure forms of employment, with little or no access to decent work or social protection, and insufficient opportunities for women to benefit from globalization and technological and digital advances.

4. Participants pointed out that unpaid care and domestic work constituted an unequal burden for women and had significant implications for women's participation in the labour market, yet that work was not included in countries' gross domestic products. There was also concern about the impact of gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices and norms, including due to family responsibilities, on women's participation in the labour force. Measures were needed to support women in balancing work and family responsibilities to enable them to participate fully in the world of work.

5. Disparities in educational opportunities and achievement persisted, affecting women's access to and participation in the labour market. Speakers also drew attention to violence and harassment, especially in the world of work, as an obstacle to gender equality and women's economic opportunities. Their prevention and elimination were key to progress for women and the full development and enjoyment of their economic and social potential, including their rights to education and work, and independence.

6. Some participants noted that women who are subject to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as rural women, Afro-descendant women, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals and women with disabilities, risked being left behind and needed particular attention. The adverse effects of conflicts and the challenges of post-conflict situations, climate change and natural disasters on development for all, especially for women and girls, were raised.

7. Participants stressed the need for robust gender-responsive normative legal and policy frameworks for advancing women's rights in the world of work, as well as their effective implementation. In that regard, ratification and implementation of international conventions, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and relevant ILO conventions, were called for.

Building alliances for women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

8. Participants stressed the importance of building alliances at global, regional, national and community levels to tackle challenges and support women's economic empowerment. At the global level, the Commission on the Status of Women provided critical impetus for action, and United Nations entities offered support and technical assistance in boosting women's participation in the world of work. Multilateral efforts and global campaigns helped, for example, in promoting equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, and aimed at the development of

international standards on ending violence and harassment against women and men in the world of work.

9. Gender-responsive labour laws, and policies and measures to end gender-based discrimination and violence, were provided as examples of ways to empower women in the world of work. Many participants gave examples of efforts to improve the work-family balance and to reduce the disproportionate burden for women of unpaid care and domestic work. Mandatory and paid parental leave for both men and women, family-friendly policies, quality and affordable childcare services and facilities, the provision of school meals for children, flexible working arrangements and the provision of pensions were presented as effective means to promote women's economic empowerment.

10. Several participants gave examples of social protection policies, especially in the informal sector, to strengthen women's labour force participation, although some participants raised concerns over their high costs and the need for additional funding from the international community to put such policies in place.

11. Examples of successful tripartite partnerships between Governments, trade unions and employers' associations were provided. Speakers stressed the critical role of unions in securing women's right to work and rights at work and improving the situation of women working in the informal economy, in care and domestic work, and in the service sector. They reaffirmed the importance of collective bargaining for negotiating better working conditions, including health and safety conditions, equal pay, minimum wages and social protection for workers. Unions also contributed to a strengthened social dialogue.

12. Participants highlighted the role of national mechanisms for gender equality in ensuring gender mainstreaming across government ministries and agencies at all levels. Such mechanisms formed critical partnerships and cooperated with line ministries to improve the situation of women workers and entrepreneurs. They also worked with the private sector and academia. Their important relationships with civil society and community-based organizations were especially praised.

13. Strong alliances between the public and private sector were considered crucial for women's economic empowerment. Examples were provided of businesses that integrated gender perspectives into company policies, either to comply with legislation or through voluntary arrangements. Many countries had introduced incentives to encourage companies to put in place gender-responsive policies at work, such as preferential treatment in public procurement, lower interest rates for loans, and seals of approval, certificates and awards to companies that achieved gender equality goals. Quota systems to increase the number of women in leadership positions and on corporate boards were also mentioned. Civil society organizations had often played a crucial role in holding Governments and the private sector accountable for their policies and practices on women's economic empowerment.

14. Increased investment in gender equality, including enhanced access for women to financial resources and credit and the promotion of the financial literacy of women, as well as gender-responsive macroeconomic policies and budgeting, had brought concrete results. Collaboration among relevant stakeholders had resulted in increased investment in the technological capabilities and digital literacy of women

and girls and enhanced education in the science, technology, engineering and mathematical sectors, as well as vocational training, to prepare women for employment, including in growth markets and non-traditional sectors.

15. The building of alliances to promote and support women's equal access to resources in both urban and rural areas was highlighted. Governments had partnered with academia and civil society to train women and build their skills in the use of technology and business management, and with banking and finance institutions to provide access to credit, loans and other banking services, especially in rural areas. Development programmes to improve women's access to maternal health services, energy, water, technology, land and housing contributed to women's economic empowerment.

16. Some participants stressed that women's reproductive health and the realization of their reproductive rights and women's control over their bodies were fundamental to the economic empowerment of women. Efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation, were also highlighted in this context. Partnerships between government and faith-based, cultural and non-conventional actors had been instrumental in those efforts. Speakers also emphasized the importance of access to comprehensive sexual education for all and of men and boys' involvement in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women.